

Message Text

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PAGE 01 MADRID 00381 181518Z
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AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
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USEC BRUSSELS

C O N F I D E N T I A L MADRID 0381

E.O.11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, SP
SUBJECT: THE BASQUE TANGLE: A ROUND UP

SUMMARY INTERIOR MINISTER MARTIN VILLA MET JANUARY 14
WITH MAYORS FROM THE FOUR BASQUE PROVINCES IN AN ATTEMPT
TO DEFUSE GROWING POPULAR UNREST IN THAT TROUBLED REGION.
MARTIN VILLA MADE NO REAL PROMISES, BUT SOME CONCRETE GOVT
STEPS WILL BE NECESSARY SOON ON SUCH ISSUES AS AMNESTY
IN ORDER FOR THE GOS TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE IN THE FOUR
AFFECTED PROVINCES. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RECENT MONTHS, THE ALWAYS TROUBLED BASQUE PROVINCES
(GUIPUZCOA, VIZCAYA, ALAVA AND NAVARRE) HAVE SUFFERED A
RESURGENCE OF POPULAR DISCONTENT FOCUSED PRIMARILY ON THE
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PAGE 02 MADRID 00381 181518Z

ISSUE OF TOTAL AMENSTY FOR "ALL POLITICAL " PRISONERS
(ALMOST ALL OF WHOM ARE BASQUES) AND, TO A LESSER
EXTENT ON OTHER PECULIARLY BASQUE ISSUES, SUCH AS
AUTONOMY, CO OFFICIAL STAUTS FOR THE BASQUE LANGUAGE
("EUSKERA") AND LEGALIZATION OF THE BASQUE FLAG
("IKURRINA") THIS UNREST HAS BEEN CHARACTERIZED AND
FED BY UNAUTHORIZAEN MASS RALLIES, FOLLOWED BY POLICE

REACTION (AND OVERREACTION), FREQUENT SOLIDARITY STRIKE
ACTIVITY AND TERRORIST ACTIVITY BY BOTH THE ULTRA LEFT AND
EXTREME RIGHT.

2. AS PART OF THIS POLITICAL CAMPAIGN, THE MORE THAN 400
MAYORS FROM THE FOUR PROVINCES SCHEDULED A "SUMMIT" MEETING
FOR JANUARY 16 IN THE SMALL NAVARRESE TOWN OF ECHARRI ARANZA.
THE GOVTS INTENTION INITIALLY WAS TO PERMIT THE SUMMIT WHERE
THE MAYORS MADE IT CLEAR THEY INTENDED TO REITERATE CALLS
FOR TOTAL AMNESTY, AND REMAINDER OF THE BASQUE PACKAGE
OF ISSUES. ACCORING TO OPPOSITION MINI COMMISSION MEMBER
JULIO JAUREGUI, OR THE BASQUE NATIONALISYPARTY (PNV)
SUEAREX TOLD HIM AS MUCH DURING THEIR MEETING BETWEEN INTERIOR
MINISTER MARTIN VILLA AND THE FOUR PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS ON
JANUARY 12. THE GOVT PROHIBITED THE MEETING BECAUSE THERE
WAS A GOOD CHANCE THAT IT WOULD BE TURNED INTO A MASSIVE
BASQUE NATIONALIST RALLY AND PUBLIC ORDER WOULD
THREATENED.

3. IN ORDER TO TAKE THE EDGE OFF THIS PROHIBITION AND
ATTEMPT TO RESTORE SOME INITIATIVE ON BASQUE QUESTIONS TO
THE GOVT, MARTIN VILLA TRAVELED TO THE BASQUE PROVINCES
ON JANUARY 14 TO DISCUSS THE ISSUES IN QUESTION WITH MAYORS OF
THE FOUR PROVINCES. HE MET FIRST IN PAMPLONA (NAVARRE) WITH
ALMOST ALL OF THE PROVINCES 265 MAYORS, AND FOLLOWS THIS
UP WITH A SESSION LATER IN THE DAY IN VICTORIA (ALAVA) WITH
SOME 200 OF THE 233 MAYORS FROM VIZCAYA, GUIPUZCOA AND ALAVA.
ABOUT 30 GUIPUZCOAN MAYORS REFUSED TO ATTEND THE VICTORIA
MEETING AND ANNOUNCED THAT THEY INTENDED TO HOLD THE
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PAGE 03 MADRID 00381 181518Z

PROHIBITED JANUARY 16 ECHARRI ARANAZ MEETINGS AS SCHEDULED.

4. IN STATEMENTS TO THE PRESS AFTER EACH OF THESE MEETINGS
(MARTIN VILLA HAS ISSUED NO PUBLIC STATEMENT SINCE HIS RETURN
TO MADRID LATER JANUARY 14), THE INTERIOR MINISTER WAS FAR
FROM EXPLICIT; HOWEVER HE DID INDICATE THAT
THE KING'S JULY 30, 1976 AMNESTY WOULD BE INTERPRETED AS
BROADLY AS POSSIBLE, BUT THE GOVT WOULD DO NOTHING TO "FAVOR
VIOLENCE". HE REMINDED HIS AUDIENCES THAT "ALL SPANIARDS ARE
NOT IN FAVOR OF A TOTAL AMNESTY", AND LEFT THE CLEAR IMPRESSION
THAT THOSE INVOLVED DIRECTLY IN TERRORISM WOULD NOT BE
RELEASED.

IT IS JUST AS UNDERSIRABLE TO PROHIBIT "EUSKER" AS TO IMPOSE
IT. ITS "CO OFFICIALITY" WITH SPANISH IS ACCEPTABLE TO THE GOVT.
THE "IKURRINA" COULD BE FLOWN DURING PRIVATE ACTS AND
AUTHORIZED PUBLIC MEETINGS, SO LONG AS THE SPANISH FLAG
WERE RESPECTED.

STEPS WOULD BE TAKEN TO RATIONALIZE THE EMPLOYMENT OF
PUBLIC ORDER FORCES IN URBAN CENTERS. HE TOLD HIS LISTENERS
THAT IT WAS NOT SO MUCH THAT THE POLICE OVERREACTED IN THE

BASQUE PROVINCES, BUT THAT BASQUE DEMONSTRATORS WERE MORE AGGRESSIVE THAN THOSE IN THE REST OF SPAIN. HE MADE IT CLEAR THAT, IN HIS VIEW, THE ISSUE OF AUTONOMY WAS SOMETHING TO BE DEALT WITH BY A DEMOCRATICALLY ELECTED PARLIAMENT, AND THAT EACH OF THE PROVINCES WAS A UNIQUE CASE AND SHOULD BE TREATED SEPARATELY (MARTIN VILLA'S SEPARATE MEETING WITH NAVARRESE MAYORS IN PAMPLONA WAS VIEWED BY MANY OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN BOTH MEETINGS AS AN ATTEMPT TO DIVIDE NAVARRE FROM THE OTHERS, ALTHOUGH THERE ARE LEGITIMATE HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL REASONS FOR DOING SO).

5. IN SPITE OF THE GOVT'S PROHIBITION OF THE JANUARY 16 MEETING THE 30 GUIPUZCOAN MAYORS AND PERHAPS AS MANY AS TEN THOUSAND OTHER BASQUES, TRAVELING IN BUS AND AUTOMOBILE CONVOYS. ATTEMPTED SUNDAY TO GATHER IN ECHARRI ARANA", BUT THEY WERE TURNED BACK BY HEAVY CONCENTRATIONS OF GUARDIA CIVIL ELEMENTS. (AMCNS BILBAO ADVISED THAT HIS SOURCES CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 04 MADRID 00381 181518Z

ALLEGED THE POLICE WERE EXTREMELY ROUGH AT ECHARRI ARANAZ YESTERDAY, EXCESSIVE EVEN BY BASQUE PROVINCES STANDARDS.) IN RESPONSE THE CONVOYS REPORTEDLY TOOK OFF MILES IN ALL DIRECTION WITH THEIR PARTICIPANTS HONKING HORNS, WAVING IKURRINAS" AND SINGING PATRIOTIC BASQUE SONGS, THE 30 GUIPUZCOAN MAYORS AND THE ECHARRIA ARANZ COUNCIL CALLED FOR AUTONOMY, CO OFFICIALITY FOR "EUKKERA" AND LEGALIZATION OF THE FLAG. THEY LATER REPORTEDLY AS THE RESULT OF THE GOOD OFFICES OF FOREIGN MINISTER OREJA, A BASQUE CONTACTED MARTIN VILLA, FIVE OF THEM WILL MEET WITH HIM TODAY IN MADRID.

6. COMMENT: MARTIN VILLA'S LIGHTENING TRIP CLEARLY WAS AIMED AT BUYING TIME WHILE THE GOVT CONSIDERS ITS NEXT STEPS. HE REALLY PROMISED NOTHING, AND NONE OF THE MAYORS APPARENTLY WENT AWAY PARTICULARLY SATISFIED. IT MUST BE REMEMBERED THE MAYORS VOICING THESE DEMANDS INCLUDING THE THIRTY WHO REFUSED TO MEET WITH MARTIN VILLA WERE CREATURES OF THE CENTRAL GOVT. HAVING BEEN DESIGNATED BY THE RESPECTIVE PROVINCIAL GOVERNORS. THE BASQUE PROBLEM IS PROBABLY THE ONE POLITICAL AREA WHERE THE SUAREZ GOVT HAS BEEN UNSUCCESSFUL: IF ANYTHING, THE BASQUE SITUATION HAS WORSENERED SINCE THE PRIME MINISTER TOOK OFFICE LAST JULY. THE GOVT WILL HAVE TO TAKE CONCRETE STEPS. PARTICULARLY ON SOME BROADENING OF THE AMNESTY, FOR EVEN THE OUTLINE OF SOME EVENTUAL SOLUTION TO BE VISIBLE. STABLER

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